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Setting the Conditions for Strategic Thought

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President's Forum

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PRESIDENT'S FORUM



Setting the Conditions for Strategic Thought

SINCE 1884, THE NAVAL WAR COLLEGE has existed as a place to study and understand the complexity of conflict. As it prepares to celebrate its 130th anniversary, the College continues to refine its educational and research programs to meet the demands of the Navy and the national security community. The Naval War College is helping to prepare and shape the Navy of Tomorrow; and we are significantly supporting the Navy of Today.

The Navy of Tomorrow. A classic Asian proverb holds, *If you are planning for one year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.* NWC is committed to helping ensure that America's future military leaders are prepared to meet the challenges of the next decade and beyond. We at the College want and need to change as the global environment evolves, while reinforcing the successful initiatives and activities that have brought us to the high level of success we currently enjoy. The College continues to refine and enhance its resident and nonresident curricula to keep abreast of the evolving national security environment and fulfill the needs of future naval leaders and our joint forces. Moreover, we are expanding our reach to the entire Navy officer and enlisted ranks, while doing more to serve fleet commanders through tailored special programs. Refined course content, new course names, and awarding of two separate degrees will complete the course bifurcation process begun a decade ago and provide our graduates with education and the academic credentials clearly in line with their academic efforts.

The Navy of Today. A number of programs and initiatives focus on nearer-term outcomes. One example is the establishment of the Naval Leadership and Ethics Center (NLEC) as an operating unit of the Naval War College. This

new organizational entity, an expansion and modernization of the former Navy Command Leadership School (CLS), will become the Navy's primary location for training and educating officers and enlisted across all warfare communities, staff corps, and subspecialties in a wide range of leadership and ethical issues. All of the College's programs and many of the NLEC curricula focus on reinforcing the "Desired Leader Attributes" identified by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey. The military's leaders must have the ability to understand the environment and the effects of all instruments of national power; to anticipate and adapt to surprise and uncertainty; to recognize change and lead transitions; to operate with commander's intent through trust, empowerment, and understanding; to make ethical decisions based on the shared values of the profession of arms; and to think critically in applying joint warfighting principles and concepts to joint operations. In describing the value of Professional Military Education (PME), General Dempsey has said, "We can't underinvest in professional military education or we will suffer challenges in the future. You just mortgage your future when you underinvest in professional military education."

In the College's intellectually stimulating environment, students can channel their minds into consideration of issues well beyond the platform or service level. They can step out of their comfort zones, and through their written papers, war games, and class presentations put forth creative solutions to complex problems. They can help reduce future strategic surprise by sharing ideas and subjecting them to the sometimes vehement critiques of peers and mentors. The genesis of a bold new idea is rarely evident at first glance. The creative process is much like the skills necessary to breathe life into a fire at a cold mountain campsite—a single spark, introduced into an environment with dry tinder and sufficient fuel, can be nurtured into a roaring fire. In a similar manner, the Naval War College is all about creating the conditions in which creative sparks can grow into strategic concepts that will help our Navy better serve the nation.

The period between the world wars is often referred to as the College's "golden era," when most of the senior naval officers who would ultimately win World War II in the Pacific spent time in Newport studying the many potential futures they were likely to face. We now find ourselves in a similar period, having drawn down from a dozen years of complex irregular conflict, and I strongly believe that naval and all military officers should now invest in themselves to improve further their ability to think strategically and contribute to the needs of the joint force of the future. A Naval War College education, in residence or via one of our excellent nonresident programs, should be in every officer's career plan. It is widely recognized that the Navy excels in training our sailors to understand and react to events they are likely to face—training for the *known* eventualities. Education, on the other hand, develops our sailors' critical analysis and

cognitive skills to help them deal with the unexpected and the *unknown*. This powerful combination of training and education, reinforced by real-world experience, equips us for success in the future.

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